

Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Father-Son Duo Investing in Conservation

by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

Father-son farming duo Larry and Mark Lamborn are reinvesting payments earned through USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to add additional conservation practices on their land, including 3,300 feet of terraces and improving yields.

The Lamborns grow corn, soybeans, hay and oats on about 1,000 acres in Allamakee and Clayton Counties in northeast Iowa. They also stay busy milking as many as 220 cows twice daily in their dairy cow operation.

As part of the 2014 Farm Bill, CSP provides financial and technical assistance to eligible producers to conserve and enhance natural resources, such as soil, water, and wildlife, on their land. If selected, farmers with CSP contracts implement additional conservation activities on their farm along with maintaining and improving existing conservation systems.

CSP pays participants for conservation performance – the higher the environmental performance, the higher the payment. The Lamborns received an annual payment for implementing conservation enhancements on cropland and some pasture. Activities included adding cover crop mixes to cropland, solar powered pumps to the livestock watering system, a wildlife escape to the watering facility, and plant tissue testing and analysis to improve nitrogen management in crops.

"From a conservation perspective, they are doing everything right," says LuAnn Rolling, district conservationist for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Allamakee County. "They have a lot of hay in the crop rotation, they farm everything on the contour, and they no-till a lot of their cropland."

The Lamborns have one particular farm north of Monona that, due to poor soil conditions, has

caused them problems for years. Mark says the silt loam soils on that farm wash easily. The farm operator prior to the Lamborns built his own small "push-up" terraces to help reduce erosion. With no tile intakes to filter out sediment and carry water to a stable outlet, Mark says those terraces blew out often during heavy rains, and funneled rainwater to a single location. "All of the topsoil was in the terraces," he said. "It was a mess."

Due to dryer than normal weather, the Lamborn's new terrace project took three years to complete. NRCS designed the terrace system and helped the Lamborns finance the project through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). About 3,300 feet of narrow base terraces now protect that field.

"We reinvested much of our CSP payment into those terraces north of Monona," said Mark.

The investment has paid off for the Lamborns. Mark says the no-till-terrace combination is improving average corn yields on that farm by more than 50 bushels per acres.

The Lamborns have also invested conservation into their dairy system. They have installed a manure settling basin, a slotted floor manure storage structure, and a circular manure storage structure to safely hold manure until it is applied to cropland. They have also installed watering systems, fences, and other necessities for a rotational grazing system.



The Lamborns (Larry, left, Mark, right, and Brock) stand on their farm near Luana in Allamakee County. The Lamborns keep busy milking cows and farming 1,000 cropland acres.

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Currently, Mark is working with NRCS to complete the design of a new 15,000 square foot monoslope building on his property that will store manure from his dairy herd, allowing him to more efficiently utilize the nutrients from manure on crop fields.

When Rolling visits the Lamborns, she says it is easy to see they are conscientious farmers. "They keep their grassed waterways in good shape, their grass headlands (field borders) are maintained, and they handle manure from the dairy operation with great care," she said.

To read more about Iowa farmers investing in conservation, visit the Iowa NRCS website at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov.



As the Allamakee County District Conservationist for 28 years, LuAnn Rolling (left) forged a working relationship with Larry Lamborn many years ago. In July, they met to talk about some of the latest conservation practices they are planning.



Structures like this circular wasted storage tank on the Lamborn's farm eliminate the risk of manure from the dairy operation running off the land into nearby streams.